DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 644 HE 029 274

AUTHOR Ackerman, Richard; Maslin-Ostrowski, Patricia
TITLE Real Talk: Toward Further Understanding of Case Story in Teaching Educational Administration.
PUB DATE Apr 96
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, April 8-12, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; *Case Studies; Classroom Techniques; *Decision Making; Discussion (Teaching Technique); *Educational Administration; Educational Strategies; Graduate Study; Higher Education; Leadership Training; Listening Skills; *Personal Narratives; Qualitative Research; Small Group Instruction; Writing Exercises

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the effectiveness of an innovative approach to the case study in teaching educational administrators in master's and doctoral programs. Subjects were 80 students in three institutions. The method uses "case stories," which differ from conventional case studies in that they are highly personal written accounts of real events that include intriguing decision points and provocative undercurrents that encourage discussion. Data for the qualitative analysis were drawn from conversations about case stories, student-written case stories, a survey, and semi-structured interviews. Based on the results, a six-stage model for writing and discussing case stories was developed. Stages include: (1) freewriting; (2) writing the case story; (3) storytelling and listening; (4) small group reflection; (5) whole group reflection; and (6) a concluding discussion about the importance of understanding and improving professional practice. Participants felt the case story method has potential to enhance professional understanding and growth. It was also determined that learning occurs in different ways (intrapersonal and interpersonal) at different stages of case story development. Three themes emerged: stories help people understand what happens to them; meaning is found not only in the story, but also in the relationship of story to teller; and group meaning-making deepens understanding. (Contains 19 references.) (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 396 644

Real Talk:
Toward Further Understanding of Case Story in Teaching Educational Administration

Richard Ackerman, University of Massachusetts Lowell, College of Education

Patricia Maslin-Ostrowski, Florida Atlantic University, College of Education

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association New York, 1996

HE 029 274

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patricia Maslin-Ostrowski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Real Talk:
Toward Further Understanding of Case Story
in Teaching Educational Administration

> *Pursue, keep up with, circle round and round your life...Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw at it still.*
> Henry David Thoreau

The purpose of this paper is to describe further our understanding of an approach to teaching educational leadership called *case story*, a method which blends aspects of the case study method (Christensen, Garvin, & Sweet, 1991) and problem-based learning (Bridges, 1992) with the tradition, artistry and imagination of story (Estes, 1992; Campbell, 1988; Whyte, 1994) and storytelling (Christensen et al., 1991; Collins, 1992; Egan, 1986; Mellon, 1992; Moore, 1991). A case story is both a written and oral description of a real life, "close-to-the-bone" leadership situation. It differs from traditional case method of instruction and problem-based learning primarily in that it is a highly personal written account of real events that includes enough intriguing decision points and provocative undercurrents to make a group of people want to think and talk about them.

In an earlier paper (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 1995), we examined and compared traditional case study methods and storytelling methods when used as companion teaching tools. In reconciling case method and case story as they applied to the experiences of graduate students, we concluded that both methods can provide complementary but distinctive perspectives on fundamental processes of learning and growth.

Underlying this study, however, is a premise that the story-form is a dominant sense-making tool for school administrators. This study builds upon theoretical constructs we uncovered and methodological strategies we employed in our previous study. Specifically, we have focused on case story as a reflective and collective learning process. We have examined how school leaders learn to think together--not just in the sense of analyzing a shared dilemma or issue, but in how story-forms shape meanings for groups of people and lead to a kind of critical conversation (Brookfield, 1995) through which thoughts, emotions and actions fit into a greater whole.

Perspectives

Case stories have their roots in a perspective well articulated by John Dewey (1963), a view that conceives of learning as a process of creating knowledge, knowledge as a mode of intelligent practice, and practice as implicit in theory. A theoretical and practical framework for our study draws, in part, on the work of C. Roland Christensen of the Harvard Business School who has stressed that discussion is the key to the case method (Christensen, et al., 1991). In addition, we have been

guided by the work of Martin Buber (1970) on dialogue, Edwin Bridges (1992) on problem-based learning, David Bohm (1994) on thought as a system, Stephen Brookfield (1995) on critical conversation, and Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1982) on organizational learning in our efforts to understand conversations around case story as a collective and reflective learning process.

Professors and students of educational administration must ultimately reckon with its essential claim: That administrative knowledge, theories and practices exist, are learnable and are worth learning. Our larger purpose in exploring case story is to look philosophically at teaching in educational administration and explore a direction that fundamentally includes the stories that the lives of our students tell (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

Methodology

The sample consisted of 80 graduate students enrolled in educational leadership masters and doctoral programs across three universities. Students were dispersed across five classes that used case stories, along with other teaching methods. We included in our sample, case stories from school leaders attending workshops and institutes. Our aim was to investigate the meaning and utility of case stories from the perspective of student and teacher, and more specifically, to examine the nature of conversation around case stories.

We chose a qualitative approach because it provided an appropriate method to examine complex learning issues. With permission, many groups of students engaged in conversations about case stories were audio-taped and/or observed. We also assembled a portfolio of case stories written by students. Given the importance of using multiple data sources, we additionally asked participants to complete a simple questionnaire that asked open-ended questions about their learning experience. We encouraged them to focus on the benefits and risks of small group conversations, as well as the process itself. In order to triangulate data further, semi-structured interviews were conducted with some students.

Questionnaires, interview transcripts, portfolios of case stories and some audio-taped discussions were analyzed and coded looking for patterns and inconsistencies across respondents. We tracked the graduate student responses in order to understand better how case stories influence the relationships between student and student, student and teacher, and the culture of the classroom. In a previous study (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 1995), we determined that findings were consistent when data were analyzed across institutions and by degree level, thus we aggregated the graduate student data base. This study does not permit generalizations to larger populations, but rather provides rich details about practicing and aspiring school leaders who have engaged in learning experiences using the case story method.

Case Story Model

The basic case story model requires a minimum of three hours. It involves the following six steps (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 1996).

Step 1: The Freewrite. As anyone who has tried to compose a a new sonnet, write a research paper or draft a story knows, getting words onto the page is not always easy and can sometimes even cause one to freeze. The writing of case stories is no exception. To warm participants to writing and to help them begin accessing issues of their own leadership, they start with a seven minute *freewrite* before moving on to developing a case story. They are asked to write on a theme such as, "The obstacle to leadership for me is..." Next, everyone is divided into groups of three. In these small groups, each person reads his or her *freewrite* aloud, highlighting the parts that are especially meaningful. Five minutes are allotted per participant, with time for reaction and dialogue.

Step 2: Writing the Case Story. Participants are shown an example of a case story and they briefly discuss it. Next, they are asked to write a one page narrative about a real-life leadership dilemma that is significant to them. Each case story is written from an emic perspective and tells an insider's point of view or conceptualization of a critical incident. Writing case stories requires one to look inward. As a student commented, "It is my idea, my story being told," and another said, "It's like a case study only from the inside out." While the case study allows an individual to assume roles and play different parts, when writing a case story the author is usually the main character and the role is always real.

A case story, then, is not a detached, faceless account, but rather presents the author's version of self. The writer sees and writes through her personal lens of gender, language, race, ethnicity and social class. She represents herself and her view in the story.

Participants are given 30-45 minutes to write a one-page narrative about a real-life close-to-the-bone leadership episode, a critical incident or dilemma that is important to them. Authors are encouraged to tell their own story, capture the context, use dialogue and give their case story a title. It can be a galvanizing experience when everyone in a room sits quietly writing (including the professor).

Step 3: Storytelling & Storylistening. After writing the case story, students join small groups of three where they collectively work to make sense of each other's case story. It is during this stage that the etic perspective unfolds for many participants (although it will have begun for some).

The process is structured so that a group rotates roles every fifteen minutes with each member taking a turn as

storyteller, timekeeper and facilitator of the process. While the others listen carefully and silently, the storyteller reads his case story aloud, then elaborates on the story and tells what he believes is the core of his story. Next, the two listeners may ask clarifying questions. Once clear about what transpired, they start to frame and interpret the issues. The intent is to explore alternatives rather than to look for a single best solution to the case story. The storyteller is advised to listen initially and observe how the other two analyze and interpret the issues before joining the conversation.

Step 4: Small Group Reflection. Groups are then merged to create groups of six. Participants are asked to consider three questions: What was it like listening to and discussing your colleagues' stories? What was it like writing, telling and hearing discussions of your own story? Do you have any other observations and reactions to the work that you have just completed?

Step 5: Whole Group Reflection. Each small group is invited to report one major topic or important finding that they explored. Everyone is given an opportunity to comment, building on one another's ideas.

Step 6: Conclusion. The session is concluded by discussing the importance of improving professional practice and stressing that to strengthen practice, people must first understand it. If participants are to make sense out of their practice, they must allow themselves time and distance for reflection, a place where they are not immersed in the problems they are seeking to solve.

Findings & Discussion

The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on. Nor all your piety and wit
Can call it back to cancel half a line
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.
Omar Khayyam

Overall, participants in this study found that using case stories is a learning strategy that has the potential to enhance their understanding and growth as educational administrators. The case story served as a springboard for thinking and rethinking their past, present and future administrative endeavors. Based on an analysis of taped conversations, observations, and written and oral assessments, we documented how learning occurs in different ways at the various stages of case story development. The fluid learning model shifted participants between a private, looking inward realm and a communal sphere where there was an openness to others engaging in the story and the search for its meaning. For our discussion, we have grouped findings according to the intrapersonal stage of case story development, which we call the *Intrahuman Realm*, and the interpersonal stage which we call the *Interhuman Realm*. (An adaptation of what Martin Buber calls "Elements of the

Interhuman.")

The Intrahuman Realm

(Writing the Case Story)

What Interests Me? According to most participants, case story writing begins with an author asking basic questions like, "What interests me? What do I want to write about?" Before putting pen to paper or tapping on the keyboard, participants report that they mined their memory banks in search of an episode or critical incident that mattered to them. Participants frequently recalled that this step was "terrifying, overwhelming at first," and wondered "What should I write about?" "What do I have to say?" One stated, "I wasn't sure what I wanted to write or if I had something to say." Others, also unsettled by the openness of the assignment, were compelled to ask their professor, "What do you want us to write about?" "Tell me what you want," and "What do you mean?" Yet for some people getting started was easy. They knew immediately what they wanted to write and "the words just spilled out."

When asked how they began writing, most respondents answered that whether easy or hard, quick or slow, they had to go through a mental selection process and make decisions about what to include and what to eliminate. Representative comments about mulling memories were, "the remembering makes me think," and "I had to think and think and think until an idea came." Given the blank piece of paper or empty screen on the monitor facing them, each participant was driven to reflect on what was important to him or her. While wrestling with what they had to say of consequence, it seems that both students and practitioners came to a story because it interested them. Typical comments were: "This was an opportunity to write about an issue that deeply concerns me," "I wrote what I wanted to think about...what I wanted to learn about," "Once I got started it was hard to stop," "I realized I had much to say about what happened," and "This was an emotionally charged issue for me." Generally, participants concluded that the basic story they chose to tell was one that they cared about, one that mattered to them personally. It is likely that participants increased the possibility of learning something through this experience because they had decided to write about a matter that interested them.

Who Am I Writing For? As participants struggled to develop their stories, many found that a major consideration was audience. An essential question for participants was, "Who am I writing for?" Certainly, this issue is consistent with what most authors experience and follows advice commonly given to writers, that is know your audience. One participant aptly summed up this concern, "I couldn't figure out what I wanted to write about until I could picture my audience."

Given the context in which case stories were developed, that is the classroom or a staff development program, it is not surprising that many writers were concerned about audience in

conjunction with issues of trust and confidentiality. Authors were told in advance that they would be reading and telling their stories to colleagues. Some later reflected, "I wondered how much I should reveal about myself," and "...what will my classmates think of me?" while others indicated that they needed to edit their stories because they were worried about making certain things public. Some students wanted to know if their professor would read the story and if it would be graded (yes to the former, no to the latter). One participant, who missed the discussion about the storytelling stage, became upset after writing her story when she realized she was expected to read it aloud. Although given permission (by the professor and peers) not to relate her story, eventually she decided that she trusted her group enough to talk about something so sensitive, but did change the characters' identity. Thus the vulnerabilty of participants and how comfortable they feel exposing themselves to others in the group--the audience, influences what they choose to write and the degree to which they tell the "whole story."

Some participants, however, came to a determination that they were writing for themselves. These individuals were somehow able to dismiss or be open to threats of confidentiality and trust. They report that they wrote what they wanted to write with little consideration of who, besides themselves, would be judging their stories. According to these participants, "I felt a sense of freedom in telling my story, my way," "I did not worry about what my group might say...I thought it was safe to write about this...," and "It was cathartic to write and not have to worry about what a board member or parent might say." In the last example, the author evidently felt secure within the classroom and could write openly, yet in a different setting it might have been folly to be so candid. It is likely that some participants who said that they wrote for themselves may have chosen a topic that was more open to public scrutiny than others and/or their group was perceived to be a safe place to reveal themselves. In general, most participants experienced some ambiguity surrounding the question of audience, and each writer had to work through the issue in his or her own way.

Groundhog Day. When questioned about the writing process, numerous participants said that once the decision was made that they were going to write a story and had an idea who they were writing for, they returned to the scene of the event. In their minds, they revisited their story and entered the "fire of their own experience" (see Whyte, 1994). Participants described their problem or situation as "messy," "ambiguous," and "not so simple." Some respondents talked about how when they tried to write the story it became more complicated than they first realized. One person commented that he felt "disoriented." It was not always easy for authors to describe what happened, especially when they attempted to look at the story from the perspective of other characters. According to participants, "I relived that week on paper and in my head...it was getting more complicated," "The writing helps me to remember," while another reflected, "I thought I was in that movie, *Goundhog Day*...I kept

going back and back trying to get it right." It is this going back to the story, into the context again, that helps the writer begin to transform a memory into narrative.

During this introspective process, characterized by one participant as "an internal debate," each author reasons what matters, what is significant. The writer has to consider the evidence and make judgments about who did what, where, how and when, and how all this influences the story. Some participants stated that as they reconstructed their stories, they recognized that the story being told was their image of what happened and was their interpretation of the local context, that is "my story."

As writers made decisions about what was in and what was out of their story, some reported that they "played with it, changed it." A respondent said, "I thought about how real I should make my story," and another commented, "When I saw my story in print I was a little shocked. Did I really do that? What made it seem so right then?" The author knows his story is real and what has happened cannot be changed. While writing, however, he might choose to alter events slightly to make someone look better, or to protect someone, or, perhaps, to tell a better story. He might do this consciously, aware of how he is writing his story in a way that changes the truth, albeit with good intentions. Alternatively, the writer may be unaware of how he is changing history.

Furthermore, remembering offers a different view of an incident and can alter the story. According to one participant, "The story I wrote today is quite different from what I would have said last month when this happened," and another comment was, "Thinking changes memories." Time can fill in the blanks and it can also distort memories. A retrospective perspective is apt to be different from what one sees at the time the event is occurring. Nonetheless, what a person writes is the truth as he knows it, his truth; all writers are partisan regardless of claims to objectivity. A good case story, then, is concerned less with the degree of objectivity, but rather is a story that is written according to the truth as the author has come to know it. Just as the moving finger knows, the writer acknowledges on some level that she cannot go back and change the deed or rewrite the story, however much she may wish to, yet she can learn to understand past behaviors, decisions and beliefs. This knowledge is what leads to improved practice.

Finding Form. For numerous participants in this study, the structure provided by the case story model was helpful in getting started writing and was also perceived to be a comfort. Given that so many respondents described the writing experience as threatening, it makes sense that many also report that the guidance and structure provided put them at ease (somewhat), and that structure is important to the writing process.

When asked to reflect on writing case stories, some

respondents stated that they appreciated the explicit directions and structure provided by their professors. In their words, "The example you gave was a model to work from," "I appreciated having something to use as a guide," "At the beginning, I couldn't imagine how I would do this...the basic story structure helped," and "I tried to relax and not worry about style as you suggested." Alternatively, some participants wanted more structure. This group of respondents said that they would have preferred more examples of case stories and help with finding their own story. Yet, on the other hand, there were some participants who said they felt constrained by the imposed structure. For example, they commented that one page was inadequate to tell their story and there was not enough time alloted for writing (there is never enough time for writing).

Some respondents stated that before they could write or as they wrote they needed to figure out their own format for telling their particular story. These participants said they had to cope with finding the form that best fit their case stories. People explained, "You encouraged us to write in first person...this was awkward...uncomfortable...I had to write my own way," "I wasn't sure what to say...how to say it...should I write this chronologically...eventually I decided on my style," while another view was, "I didn't know how I could write a story like the one you showed us...I had to find my own way of telling this story...of honoring my story."

Along with structure, writers needed to determine boundaries and decide how to describe the setting, characters as well as plot. Once these matters were established, people said they felt better and more confident about what they were producing.

The vulnerability of the case story writer demands a model from which to work. When the structure is provided for writers, however, there may be tension between modeling what has been presented and a need to honor one's own story. Yet it takes structure for good stories to develop. Finding form, then, appears to be an important step toward writing case stories about leadership.

Momentum. Interviews and respondents' written comments suggest that a number of the authors experienced an important phase when there was momentum to their writing. They described this as a time when they felt like they "were into it," and "the story was cooking." This momentum typically arrived after they found what interested them, had already decided on their audience, and had developed a structure for their case story.

One participant described momentum this way, "Suddenly I was just writing...my writing took off...the words were flowing...it was wonderful," while another noted, "There was a moment when I knew I had it...the story was just coming...bubbling up...I was writing away." The data suggest that this step was exhilarating for writers and that it was a time when they allowed their story to unfold naturally without judging it. This momentum occurred

minus much of the anxiety many had experienced in the earlier stages of writing.

Story Theorizing. When tracing their writing experience for this study, many participants reported that after they completed a first draft they were able to give new meaning to their stories. What became clear from respondents' experiences was once the case story was out of their heads and onto a piece of paper, they were ready to tackle it again from a fresh perspective.

One graduate student wrote, "I kept reading and rereading the story to myself...in time I was able to see it differently," while a participant in a professional development seminar said, "I tried to look at my story like an outsider...I thought about how others might view it...I started to see how to put it together better." In contrast, there were participants who reached this point and reported that they were satisfied with what they had produced. Constructing and reconstructing the case story, then, is a way for some participants to see how the parts are linked and has potential for new meanings to emerge.

The Interhuman Realm

(Storytelling and Storylistening)

Knee-Jerk Talk. When asked to reflect on the group experience, many respondents described a period of awkwardness and uneasiness, a time when the communication felt contrived. These participants reported that the prescribed roles required them to act in ways that were different or even new to them. In their words, "I was totally self-conscious when we started...felt clumsy," "I had to stop myself from telling her how it really is," and "My instinct was to find the answer, be an authority." For some participants, it was difficult to stay within the assigned group roles and they did not do so. One such participant said, "When I charged in with my reaction to his story I saw his face and knew I was breaking the rules...I couldn't help myself."

Despite the discomfort, some participants believed that the group experience was beneficial in that it showed how they usually talk to each other. For example one participant said,

> It seemed simple at first. Write something and talk about it...turns out the simple thing is to do what we always do...point out what someone did well and then tell them how to do it better, how to do it my way...We went beyond that.

Thus for numerous participants, their "group talk" stirred feelings of uncomfortableness and for some even distress and ineptitude as they struggled with their communication styles. Yet some repondents reported that this experience helped to make them aware of their habits of communication.

Toward Real Talk. The students and practitioners in this study believed that the group experience facilitated their learning to varying degrees and many attributed their growth to the sharing of stories. Participants identified the conversation around stories as the most significant part of this experience. According to one participant,

> As an administrator, I take a risk in sharing my problems publically...I was hesitant a first...but the people in my group were truly paying attention. We seemed to resonate with each other...This was a powerful experience for me.

In particular, respondents talked a great deal about the importance of being listened to and of listening to others. Participants commented, "I let go of my ideas, at least temporarily," "I'm usually pretty opinionated but I worked at holding back and tried to hear what the others were saying," "I felt like people were listening to me," "I was fascinated by their stories," and "I slowed down and became tentative...as principal I feel I need to have answers...this was refreshing." This set of respondents commented that when people were genuinely paying attention, the group "was there for each other." In contrast, some participants felt disappointment and frustration when "they were not heard," and said, "I don't think they understood what I was trying to say."

A number of people also mentioned how their group found common ground even when their world views were far apart. In the words of one such participant, "We didn't agree but I respected his way of thinking," while another said, "I believe they have a better idea of why I confronted the team leader, even though they would have handled it differently."

In sum, when participants traded case stories they were at times inspired to try to listen to each other carefully and work to overcome differences. This brought them closer to finding meaning in each other's stories.

Emotion Language. When invited to describe and react to the storytelling and storylistening step, numerous respondents said that this experience evoked emotions and was emotionally engaging. Participants talked about what they felt toward others and how others reacted to them and what they said. They cited a range of emotions and feelings to characterize what they experienced during the group process, for example empathy, sympathy, respect, acceptance, rejection, embarassment, frustration, anger, scorn, boredom, excitement, and so on. As storyteller, some people stated that they felt emotions during the telling, such as about what they were saying, while simultaneously registering feelings about how they thought their ideas were being received. Many people commented how the others in their group either did or did not respond to their case story as they had wanted, and the resultant emotion. Few respondents

were passive about this experience.

In addition, some participants said that they listened for how emotion was communicated, not just the words. They noted the importance of nonverbal behavior to communicate emotion, for example eye contact and how focused people were on the story being discussed. Comments ranged from, "The look he gave made me furious. I felt like he was chastising me," to "You could hear a pin drop. Every eye was on her...we were nodding, offering support and unspoken praise for taking such a risk." For this group of respondents, the sensory experience was integral to verbal communication. For almost all participants this was an emotional experience.

Merging Meanings. Generally, participants described the group process as a learning experience that was social in nature and one that centered on collaborative inquiry and reflection. From their responses, it is evident that people learned in different ways during the storytelling and storylistening stage, yet a common denominator was interaction among group members.

Some respondents commented that they simply received information or advice from their colleagues. Participants also reported that they got feedback and even a practical solution to a problem at work, while others felt the comfort of validation from their group for what they had done. They made statements like, "Hearing other people's case stories makes me feel like I'm not crazy," "Now I don't feel so alone," and

> Getting other people's perspectives of the situation helped to validate that the steps I took were normal and customary. It was useful to hear that any reasonable person would have acted in a similar fashion.

Numerous participants recounted how they began to look at their situation in a different way. By telling their story to others, by opening up to critical reflection and criticism, they found that it was possible to increase their understanding of practice. One such participant wrote,

> Our work lives do not permit us to talk in this way...a way that accesses my own problems and puts them on the table...I was trapped in my own interpretation. I began to see more, and more clearly how I need these other perspectives.

Yet another respondent said,

> His example echoed my story...then she talked about another problem that was similar to what happened at my school...Before long the stories had blended together.

This statement shows that some groups began to focus less on one person and one case story as they tried to learn together. Along

these lines a participant wrote, "The questions were good...less competition...there was more give than take...boundaries blurred....we stepped outside of ourselves."

Some respondents talked about how they got better at this interpersonal process with each successive case story. They said their analysis moved from case story to case story, while a few noted connections to readings and reform theory. On the other hand, many participants did not report discussing links between the different case stories or theory.

Relationship. For some respondents, this stage signaled a new relationship. The telling, listening and talking dynamic encouraged them to relate to each other in a way that does not frequently occur in classrooms or staff development programs. As one participant remarked, "The caring and attention I received was not the norm for group activities," while another said, "We started off as competitors but ended up collaborators." Alternatively, for other participants the group experience and relationship was not so powerful. They perceived it as "no big deal," "business as usual," and "I did not like (respect) one member of my group but it was still a useful exercise."

The experience of some respondents, however, suggests that their group evolved and functioned in a way which allowed them to participate in each other's stories. They commented, "This was not about right answers," and "My group did not resolve anything but I learned a lot!" A principal summed up this view,

> The challenge was to let go of my need to be the leader...a hero. I joined the circle. I responded from within...We flowed collaboratively.

For a small group of participants, the relationship was the achievement. The bond created between and among colleagues and the remaking of an experience is what they valued most from the case story model. In their words,

> The power of the case story for me was the group experience. The way our conversation moved I felt we were getting at something bigger than the problem being discussed.

Conclusion

> *Narrative involves the gathering together of events into a plot which signification is given to the events as they relate to the theme of the story. The plot configures the events into a whole and the events are transformed from merely serial, independent happenings into meaningful happpenings that contribute to the whole theme. As the meaning and function of an individual word becomes clear when the sentence of which it is a part is understood, so the significance of an individual event becomes apparent when one knows*

the plot of which it is apart.
Donald Polkinghorne, p. 143, 1988

The elements that form the basis for what we have called (borrowing Buber's wonderful terms), the *Intrahuman* and the *Interhuman*--What Interests Me? Who am I Writing For? Groundhog Day; Finding Form; Momentum; Story Theorizing; Knee-Jerk Talk; Toward Real Talk; Emotion Language; Merging Meanings; Relationship--suggest an order to a process that we recognize is actually quite disorderly and messy. We fully recognize that our own search for the meaning of our findings at this point is, at best, speculative. We see the elements that we have identified as a further iteration of our own story of the case story approach to teaching and learning and, as such, our inquiry and speculations may be useful to the many others we're meeting on this same search. But we heartily acknowledge that our own so-called "findings" freeze in time what remains a magnificent and mysterious process for humans: the telling of stories. The purpose of our inquiry is not to foster a pedagogical orthodoxy. Rather, it is to present a framework for looking at how people make sense of their experience and what they do with the sense they make.

The literature on narrative as a means of understanding learning and teaching continues to burgeon at a stunning pace. Our own explorations of case story as an approach to teaching educational leadership affirms for us that stories are something that people naturally do at a fundamental level of meaning-making. Ideally, we would like to conceive of Colleges of Education and Departments of Educational Leadership as places where students are invited in a natural way to reconstruct their stories of practice and share them. We have found that stories are not only there waiting to be told, they are significantly formed in their telling and, as such, subject to influence and mediation by others. Thus, we believe that students may be helped to tell their stories with better and more meaningful results.

Three inter-related themes emerge from our overall findings: Stories help people understand what happens to them; meaning is found not only in the story, but in the experience of relationship which makes meaningful the events of the story and the teller of the story it joins; and group meaning-making breaks the fragmentation in talking that often occurs and helps people arrive at a kind of "real talk" that deepens their understandings of each other's experiences. The story, the telling and the "real talk" that follows has the potential to affirm an underlying and deeper unity among people. It is what Martin Buber (1988, p. 76) describes as "a time when the word arises in a substantial way between men who have been seized in their depths and opened out by the dynamic of an elemental togetherness."

Stories Help People Understand What Happens to Them. We like the term *intra human* precisely because it describes the

trying out of a variety of relationships with one's chosen experience with the hope, ultimately, of seeing that experience anew and telling it in the reconstructed form of a "story." The elements of what we have called the *Intrahuman* (What Interests Me? Who Am I Writing For? Groundhog Day; Finding Form; Momentum; Story Theorizing) suggest the evolution of a storywriter's thinking toward an increasingly reflective stance, the person's experience being the object of that reflection. Thus, all of these elements taken together represent a series of varied approaches that people may use as a way of "opening" themselves up to their own experience. In summoning their own experience through the various steps we have outlined, we see an important movement from--What do <u>you</u> mean?--toward--What do <u>I</u> mean? <u>Selecting</u> the audience for the story, <u>entering</u> (having the courage to enter) the fire of one's own experience, <u>choosing</u> the form and ultimately reconstructing one's story requires an <u>active learning stance,</u> as opposed to a passive one. This implies taking a position in the world as it is narrated now by <u>me,</u> as opposed to somebody else. We see this movement signaling a kind of narrative freedom; the freedom to reconstruct one's experience, not be constructed by it.

Fundamentally, accepting the rich and vast complexity of a person's experience as suitable story material seems to us to represent a critical stage in the reconstruction process, an event that seems to occur in our observations around the steps we call "Finding Form" and "Momentum." It is a time, we have noticed, when the storywriter is both in a state of vulnerability, able to "see" anew the, perhaps, "not so seen and the taken for granted" aspects of his/her experience and, most importantly, accepts the complexity of these events without premature judging or synthesizing. It is the experience of remembering things one has forgotten about an event--remembering in a way that doesn't necessarily manipulate, intervene or change it, but to see it in all of its dimensions taking it in as it comes. We see this movement as the important exercise of imagination in the story development process--when people allow themselves to be immersed in the fullness of their own experience and to let that experience be seen (by them).

From our point of view, the movements described above suggest some of the ways a person begins to recover meaning in their own story and leads to our final element in the *Intrahuman Realm*, what we call "Story Theorizing." The characteristics of this dimension are the least clear for us, but this stage seems to imply the height of imagining and questioning in the story process. It is a time when the story itself is subject to questioning by the person, but not the kind of questioning that leads to abstract analysis or to which ready answers are known. Rather, it is a time when the story, now on paper and "outside" of the person is still allowed to cross the storywriter's own boundaries and, well, ...to just *be* there. It is a time, perhaps, best described for now, when the lines between storywriter and story are quite fragile, tender and thin, when it is difficult for a person to know who is the storywriter and who

is the story. This kind of adaptive dissonance (about which Dewey and so many others have written) achieves at least the possibility of putting a person in the role of a theorist of their own experience, able now to speculate about it anew.

Meaning is found not only in the story, but in the experience of relationship which makes meaningful the events of the story and the teller of the story it joins. The elements that comprise the realm of the *Interhuman*--Knee-Jerk Talk; Toward Real Talk; Emotion Language; Merging Meanings; Relationship--serve to extend our conceptions of story not only as a personal and reconstructive act, but as a communal activity. As we reflect on the steps described in this dimension, we find that the power of sharing stories lies not only in the evolution of the stories themselves, but in the communal nature of sharing the stories. In other words, we found that meaning for many participants doesn't only lie in their stories. It is also found in the collective grasping of experiences reflectively that lead to meaning.

We are cautious about generalizing too much about the specific qualities of the case story groups we have observed engaging in the telling and sharing of their stories. Nevertheless, we believe that each group creates itself, develops its own organic quality, sets its own limits, and establishes its own goals--and is capable of doing this in a very short time. That fact, in and of itself, seems quite noteworthy to us. To be sure, some groups will delve more deeply into their own stories than others. Some groups provide greater support and comfort, but the potential for learning may be just as great in a "troubled" group. We believe that for most groups, their routes to understanding and meaning occurs through confronting and learning to cope with the micro-complexity of their own experiences told through stories, a complexity that is not often available in traditional classrooms. Participating in the development of a case story group can be an exercise that enables escape from the habitual competition for one another's resources, and genuine participation in each person's story.

Group meaning-making breaks the fragmentation in talking that often occurs and helps people arrive at a kind of "real talk" that deepens their understandings of each other's experiences. Real talk is a process, not an event, to paraphrase something that is often said about change as well. The case story model imposes a kind of self-conscious structure on people's role around sharing and listening to stories that we think helps to create some of the conditions for a different kind of talk and listening to occur. Specifically, we find that people experience a variety of forms of listening and being listened to that, together, serve to break certain kinds of conversational conditioning. We have consistently found that the rhythm and pace of talk changes deceptively in the *Interhuman Realm*. At the start of story sharing, conversations often reflect statements like: "This is how it is," "Yes...but," "That's impossible," "No, no I don't think so, because..." As

we've tracked this kind of talk, we invariably see the presence of assumptions on the part of the storytellers and the listeners, reflexively connected to beliefs. Our emerging sense (and hope) for the case story model is that it has the capacity to break this knee-jerk talk that often characterizes habitual conversation.

Steps #3, #4 and #5 of the case story model place a very particular structure on the conversation (see Case Story Model). Getting accustomed to these roles is a self-conscious activity and, naturally, it takes time for groups to learn them. But, we have found that the structure leads to a process of group inquiry (clarifying questions) and reflection (watching the case being discussed) that allows participants to begin to "invert" the habitual directions of their "talk." Clarifying questions generate information, whether one is asking oneself or others. Reflection allows one to examine information and discover its relationships. The combination of questions and reflection potentially permits a new kind of exploration for the storytellers and the participants, instead of simply repeating the same movements again and again. Clarifying questions lead to reflection where one makes connections formulating new questions. This in turn generates new material for the story which now becomes a story that the group, in a sense, is making. An ascending spiral starts to emerge toward better understanding and, most important, the development of shared meaning. Of course, the process doesn't always lead to new perceptions. Sometimes questions are responded to mechanically and so much depends on how questions are formulated. Nevertheless, this "inversion," we think, is what allows each of the participants to visualize each other's stories as if they were seen in a mirror and forms the basis for the beginning of what we think is, real talk.

********To be continued!********

References

Ackerman, R., & Maslin-Ostrowski, P. (1995, April). Developing *case stories*: An analysis of the case method of instruction and storytelling in teaching educational administration. Paper presented at The Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

Ackerman, R., Maslin-Ostrowski, P., & Christensen, C. (1996). Case stories: Telling tales about school. *Educational Leadership, 53*(6), 21-23.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1982). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Bohm, D. (1994). *Thought as a system*. London: Routledge.

Bridges, E. M. (1992). *Problem-based learning for administrators*. Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Buber, M. (1970). *I and thou*. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.
Buber, M. (1988). *The knowledge of man: Selected essays*. Atlanta Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc.
Campbell, J. (1988). *The power of myth*. NY: Doubleday.
Christensen, C. R., Garvin, D. S., & Sweet, A. (Eds.), (1991). *Education for judgment: The artistry of discussion leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
Collins, C. (1992). *Tell me a story*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
Dewey, J. (1963). *Experience and education*. NY: Collier Books & Macmillan Publishing Company.
Egan, K. (1986). *Teaching as storytelling*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Estes, C. P. (1992). *Women who run with the wolves: Myths and stories of the wild woman archetype*. NY: Ballantine Books.
Mellon, N. (1992). *Storytelling and the art of imagination*. Rockport, MA: Element Press.
Moore, R. (1991). *Awakening the hidden storyteller*. Shambala Press.
Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Whyte, D. (1994). *The heart aroused: Poetry and the preservation of the soul in corporate America*. NY: Doubleday/Currency.
Witherell, C., & Noddings, N. (Eds.), (1991). *Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education*. NY: Teachers College Press.